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AUTHOR Brogan, Bernard R.
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ABSTRACT

Educational leaders may recognize the promise of a performance-based educational system, but often are wary of confronting well-orchestrated special interest groups who oppose the change. This paper provides a basis for dialogue on both the promise of outcome-based education (OBE) and the challenge it presents to educational leaders. It argues that the success of OBE depends on enlightened leadership and that administrator-education programs play a critical role in preparing administrators for the transition process. The paper provides a brief background of the OBE movement and identifies concerns raised by opponents. It then describes the conditions essential to the implementation of OBE: (1) trust; (2) the concept of education as a journey; (3) continuous and benchmark assessment; (4) student readiness; (5) an engaging learning environment; (6) family involvement; (7) qualified teachers; (8) state-of-the-art facilities; (9) community partnerships; and (10) shared school governance. Contains 14 references. (LMI)

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Outcome-Based Education and Administrative Training: What Educational Leaders Need to Know and Be Able to Do

Bernard R. Brogan,
Widener University
Chester, PA 19013

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Bernard R, Brogan,
Widener University

Prologue

My interest in outcome-based education began five years ago while I was working for the Wisconsin Commission on Schools for the 21st century. The charge of the Commission was to study elementary and secondary education in Wisconsin and make recommendations on ways to improve it. In my view, an interesting transformation took place midway through the year long process when the commissioners began to realize that there was something fundamentally wrong with an educational system that places so great an emphasis on inputs (instructional time, carnegie units) and so little emphasis on the results of those efforts (what students actually learned). Although there was lively debate on other issues such as school choice and school funding, there was a strong consensus that "...a sharply focused academic mission for all Wisconsin schools requires...systematic achievement and assessment of...*learner outcomes*" (A New Design for Education in Wisconsin, 1990, p. 12). Outcome-based education (OBE) was the incontrovertible cornerstone of the Commission's recommendations for educational reform in Wisconsin. Like Missouri, Connecticut, Illinois, California and a number of other states, Wisconsin was committed to making the "paradigm shift" from an educational system where success

is based not on the time spent in the learning process, but rather on the results of that educational experience.

In 1991, I moved to Pennsylvania where the education department was in the midst of adopting the nation's first statewide outcome-based reform initiative. Beginning in local newspapers and later in state and national journals, stories of opposition to outcome-based education emerged. Teacher Magazine (October, 1993) ran a cover story entitled, *Rebel Mom*, describing Peg Lusik's campaign to stop OBE in its tracks. Although the report failed to mention Ms. Lusik's impressive political background - instead detailing her involvement with the girls scouts and swimming lessons, the story provides school administrators with some important insights into the rationale behind those opposed to outcome-based education. A more straightforward account of what is motivating the anti-OBE movement can be found in a series of stories featured in the December, 1993 issue of Educational Leadership and more recently in Pennsylvania Educational Leadership (Leight, 1994). The most compelling stories for me, however, are those shared by the students in my educational administrative courses describing their communities' encounters with the anti-OBE movement. These communities, and communities across the country, have experienced a campaign against outcome-based education that is testimony to both the willingness of special interest groups to make OBE the weapon in their fight to "get back our schools" and to what Merton calls the "high-level policy of cowardice" (Merton, 1994, p.56) displayed by school districts confronted with these issues. Opponents of outcome-

based education have raised concerns - some legitimated and others, in my view, purposely misleading - over their district's efforts to establish learner outcomes for all students in the district. This reaction presents a challenge to those educational administrators who recognize the promise of a performance-based educational system but are fearful of confronting well orchestrated special interest groups adamant about asserting their political right to oppose outcome-based education and all it - and other school reforms - stand for. Preparing educational leaders for this challenge, and for the subsequent challenges that the success of the anti-OBE movement will undoubtedly generate, may well be the most important responsibility of administrative preparation programs in this era of school reform.

Introduction

Outcome-based eduction is considered by a number of educational theorists and policy makers as the answer to the complex question of how American schools can prepare students for the challenges they will face upon graduation (Finn, 1992; Spady, 1988; Glasser, 1991; Building a Nation of Learners, 1992; Pennsylvania Education, 1993). However, school districts that have began the process of implementing programs based on learner outcomes have increasingly been confronted by critics who question the basic assumptions of the OBE approach, the legitimacy of requiring some of the outcomes, and the validity and reliability of assessing the demonstrations of learning (Simonds, 1993; McQuaide & Pliska; Fowler-Finn, 1993; Shanker, 1993). Educational administrators frequently find themselves center-stage in

this debate faced with the difficult challenge of moving their district along in the reform process while attempting to ameliorate the concerns of those opposing the change.

This paper is premised on the belief that the success of outcome-based education will depend on "enlightened leadership" and that administrative training programs have a critical role to play in preparing educational leaders for the complex task of leading their schools and communities through the transition from inputs to learner outcomes. A brief background to the outcome-based eduction movement is provided along with some of the legitimate concerns being raised by those opposing the reform. The paper concludes with a listing of essential conditions that administrative training programs may wish to consider in preparing educational leaders for the challenge of outcome-based education.

Background

Outcome-based education calls for a shifting from the traditional approach where the emphasis is on inputs to an outcome-based system where the emphasis is on performance standards for all students. Central to this shift is a change in expectations for student learning, in the practice of teaching, and in the organization and management of public schools with an emphasis on (1) establishing what it is we want students to know and be able to do, (2) designing appropriate assessments to measure how well students are achieving these outcomes, and (3) holding students, teachers, administrators accountable for reaching these goals and expectations (Elmore, 1989). Burns and Squires

(1987) argued that "defining useable learning outcomes is [the] critical first activity" (p. 2). Once the school community (teachers, parents, administrators, taxpayers, business leaders) decides what it is graduates from their schools need in order to be economic and cultural contributors to their community, the process of developing a strategic plan for ensuring that all students achieve these outcomes can begin.

The concept of requiring individuals to demonstrate mastery is widespread and represents an idea that dates back to the middle ages when the guild required a "masterpiece" for admission. The premise for outcome-based learning dates back in the history of American education and most clearly surfaced in Ralph Tyler's influential book, The Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction (1949). Tyler suggested four questions that must be addressed in writing curriculum: (1) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? (2) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? (3) How can these educational experiences be effectively organized? (4)How can we determine whether these purposes are being attempted? Educational administrators in school districts that are attempting the transition to an outcome-based system must recognize the difficult challenge these questions present in that there is lack of agreement on what young people need to know and be able to do as a result of their education, and little consensus on the best strategies to help students achieve these outcomes.

The assumptions of outcome-based education are compelling: all students can learn, whether students learn is more important than

when they learn it, success breeds success, demonstrations of learning should be required for graduation (Spady, 1988). The important point here is that if we establish meaningful goals for education and we expect all students to demonstrate that they have accomplished them, we will need to go beyond the traditional approach to teaching and learning. and "multiple choice" assessment. Performance-based education challenges the "bell-cell" organization currently in place in many high schools and recognizes that the achievement of meaningful learner outcomes means more than the acquisition of a body of knowledge. Because outcome-based education is premised on an entirely different organizational framework than currently exists in public education, educational leaders who advocate "piling" learner outcomes on top of the current system will not likely realize noticeable results but will open themselves to the type of criticism being raised by those who are generally opposed to any change in the system.

Educational leaders must also be cautious in presuming that stakeholders are generally dissatisfied with the current system when in fact many parents and teachers are satisfied and resistant to any major change (Margolis, 1991). Proponents of outcome-based education also assume that community consensus on graduation outcomes will prevail. As compelling as outcome-based education may be, experienced administrators are quite familiar with well-intentioned restructuring initiatives that failed because of political miscalculations. The repeated lesson for educational administrators is that major school reforms including outcome-based education will only succeed if carried out

through a process of stakeholder involvement. This means that administrators and policy makers must listen to and address those questions that are being voiced by the various stakeholders. The questions listed below are by no means comprehensive but do reflect the type of concerns that are being raised at the community level in response to outcome-based education.

What evidence do we have that outcome-based education works any better than the current system?

Who determines the outcomes and whose values should they reflect?

Given organizational and financial constraints, how will the current system accommodate the major reorganization that will be necessary in order to make the "transformation" to outcome-based education?

What will result in terms of expectations if we require all students to achieve performance standards? What about those who fail to meet these performance standards?

What assurance can we provide parents who are satisfied with the current system that their children will not suffer academically as a result of an outcome-based system?

How reliable is performance assessment that is based on criterion validation?

It is beyond the purpose of this paper to consider a response to these questions; in fact, the answer to some these questions depends in part on conditions unique to each community. Nevertheless, administrators need to seriously contemplate these issues and be prepared to engage in honest dialogue with stakeholders in their school communities in how best to respond to these and other questions in ways that are meaningful and satisfying .

Conditions Essential to the Implementation of OBE

Educational leaders and administrative training programs may wish to consider the following areas in their dialogue on what is essential to the successful implementation of outcome-based education.

1. Trust

Al Mamary, the former superintendent of schools in Johnson City, NY - a district that has been performance-based for several years writes that mutual trust drives all good outcome-based schools. "Outcomes-based schools believe there is no place in school for fear, boss management, bullying, sarcasm, or coercion." Teachers need to recognize their responsibilities as educational leaders, and educational administrators must recognize that they cannot do it alone.

2. *Education as a Journey, Not A Destination*

Outcome-based education is primarily a process, not a product. Although it is critically important that there be common agreement on the destination, the emphasis must be placed on continuous engagement in the learning process. If this is done effectively, the result will be a

accomplished graduate ready and eager to continue his or her lifelong journey of learning.

3. Continuous and Benchmark Assessment

Student performance should be evaluate for continuous improvement and educational outcomes should be assessed at regular intervals throughout the student's elementary and secondary schooling. These assessments should assist schools and parents in planning developmentally appropriate educational programs throughout the student's school years.

4. Students Ready for School - Schools Ready for Students

Children should begin the learning process earlier. All children should be assessed at the earliest practical time to determine their individual educational needs. This assessment should identify needs and prescribe developmentally appropriate experiences necessary so that each five year old child can enter school ready to learn. Those needing special attention should receive it through Head Start and other early education programs initiated and supported through joint collaboration among schools, social service agencies, and community-based organizations.

5. An Engaging Learning Environment

The learning environment should be sensitive to the developmental needs of the individual student. Students should be active learners, growing through progressive experiences in seeking, organizing, and applying knowledge and skills in cooperative learning environments. Students should have continuous opportunity to grow

intellectually and emotionally through dialogical learning, investigation of important facts, values, and concepts, creative expression in the fine arts, integration of mathematics into multidisciplinary scientific and technical applications, creative hands-on problem-solving, and collaboration with fellow students and teachers. The relationships between and amongst students and teachers and student should be understood as the heart of what matters.

6. Family Involvement

Family involvement is essential to the success of outcome-based student achievement. Schools need leaders that make the message clear that parents are welcomed partners in the educational process. Parents must understand the expectations of the school and be carefully informed on the progress of their child.

7. Qualified Teachers

Teachers have the primary responsibility for enabling students to achieve the goals and objectives of an outcome-based curriculum and consequently need ample opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to implement outcome-based learning and assessment. High academic standards are needed in teacher preparation programs to insure that individuals entering the teaching profession are fully prepared in the knowledge, pedagogy, and learning assessment techniques needed to teach successfully in an outcome-based system. Educational administrators need to provide professional development opportunities that prepare in the knowledge and skills required to foster active

learning, teach higher-order thinking, and teach cross-disciplinary subjects in an integrated learning environment.

8. State of the Art Facilities

If students are to achieve the necessary proficiency in integrated applications of knowledge and higher-order problem solving, they need access to technical support systems including multimedia computers and school libraries that have electronic on-line library circulation systems and on-line data bases and communication linkages, and other state-of-the-art resources as they are developed. Schools need to be led by administrators who are aware of these technologies and committed to accessing them.

9. A Community Partnership

A comprehensive policy for the development of youth through collaboration with the local, regional, and state community is essential. Tapping the almost unlimited potential of school facilities as year-round Lifelong Learning Centers, the school should be the center of the community. In addition, school leaders must forge partnerships with postsecondary institutions, the business community, and other community agencies and organizations are needed. Community agencies and organizations should be encouraged to use available facilities in and near the schools to provide support services to children.

10. School Governance

It is not likely that the goals of outcome-based education will be achieved unless there is a change in the way schools are governed. In fact, it may be argued, that the success of outcome-based education will

be proportional to the extent of change in the current structure and organization of schools. Many teachers feel left out of school policy decisions that directly affect what goes on in their classroom. School administrators are likewise frustrated with the need to comply with outside policies and mandates that stand in the way of school performance. The need for a shift in the focus of school governance from centralized input-oriented mandates to decentralized outcome-based performance standards is clear. Administrators must also recognize that an increase in the local authority of school-based professionals in areas such as budget, personnel and curriculum is necessary. School districts need to engage in strategic planning and evaluation for the purpose of achieving higher levels of educational outcomes.

Conclusion

Outcome-based education has the potential to dramatically change the way in which our schools are organized. Educational leaders must be prepared to lead their school communities through this transition. As the influence of outcome-based education expands, a number of questions and concerns have surfaced. This paper endeavored to provide a basis for dialogue on both the promise of outcome-based education and the challenge it presents to educational leaders.

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